



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **One Youth at a Time: Horticulture and Youth Mentoring Provides a Fresh Start**

**SANTA BARBARA, CA – July 24, 2012**

In Santa Barbara's lower economic neighborhoods, participants from the A-Ok program operated through the City's Parks & Recreation Department are finding that getting down and dirty, working the earth and growing fresh produce can change the way they eat as well as their outlook on life. For the past 3 years, Parks & Recreation's Neighborhood & Outreach Services staff have mentored approximately 100 plus students by filling their minds—and stomachs-- through the One Youth at a Time program which offers training in organic farming practices, sustainable living and practical business skills. This program has given these students a fresh start and a chance to change their life situation and possibly troubled pasts.

The program works with approximately 45 children ages 5 to 17 years old from the Lower Westside and Franklin Elementary School's A-Ok program. Every week the participants walk to the Yanonali Community Garden and the Children's Garden at Parque de los Niños run by the Parks & Recreation Department where they can enjoy the outdoors, exercise, and learn that hard work can pay off later in life. Whether it is sports, a job or getting a college degree, this program helps to teach them that showing up is what matters.

Mary Johnson-Deleon, a Master Gardener who has volunteered her time over the program's 3 year period, explains that "the most important thing is showing up and seeing these kids enjoy being at the garden. It's a safe place for them to see that adults care for them and want them to succeed in life. *One Youth at a Time* provides a much-needed bridge to a productive, stable future."

Other Neighborhood & Outreach Services projects have included environmental cleanup and food distribution projects involving at risk young men and women from the local continuation schools and the Santa Barbara Probation Department's ADP program (Alternative Detention Program). These projects work in conjunction with UCSB's Associated Student Body and E.A.O.P Program (Education Academic Outreach Program). Currently participants with this project have collected over 5 tons of environmental electronic waste from the community and some youth have received stipends or community service hours. The University has provided peer workshops for these participants during these events; without UCSB's supportive partnership, this project could not have been implemented.

Some of these project participants have been employed with the City through the Apprenticeship Program also operated through NOS. The Apprenticeship Program provides up to 150 hours of paid on-the-job training opportunities with various departments within the City of Santa Barbara.

For more information on any of the valuable youth services provided by the City's Neighborhood & Outreach Services, please contact Pete Leyva, Neighborhood & Outreach Services Coordinator, at (805) 897-1924.

*Photos of Yanonali Garden One Youth at a Time participants by Pete Leyva.*

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